

# A Day in the life

## A Day in the Life of Congressman Rahall

NOTE: Please see Congressman Rahall's Biography for more information.

### FIRST THING IN THE MORNING:

First of all, I arrive in the office, usually before the House convenes at 10:00 a.m. I often attend early-morning (between 7:30 and 8:30 a.m.) breakfasts with groups from West Virginia who are in Washington to discuss pending legislation or other matters of concern to them. I arrive early in order to go over my floor folder which tells me which bills are being taken up and debated on the floor of the House that day. I review information gathered by my staff as to what the majority of West Virginians think about such legislation -- or if in fact it has been of interest to them. I brush up on the provisions in the bills being presented, and decide how I will vote on them. There are hundreds of pages of paper that have to be read and understood on the pros and cons of each bill before votes can be cast.

Committees on which I serve are the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee (and I am the ranking democrat on the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation); and the Committee on Resources. It is of interest that, should the Democratic party again take control (become the majority party) of the House, I would be the Chairman of the Surface Transportation Subcommittee, rather than its "ranking Democrat."

### THE REMAINDER OF EACH DAY:

Activities on the "Floor" of the House and voting on legislation:

If the bill or bills come out of the committees on which I serve, such as the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, or the Committee on Resources, I will already have an in-depth knowledge of what it contains and how I am going to vote. Often, advance notice is not given as to what the opposition is going to try to do in order to derail, change, or seriously weaken the legislation. I must obtain good information and then read up on the amendments being offered. Often I will seek out some of my House colleagues to discuss pending legislation. Some amendments to bills are strengthening in nature, and I will vote for them. Others are weakening, so I vote against them.

On legislation pending for a vote which did not come from the committees on which I serve, then I really have to do my homework, studying not only the content of the bill itself, but amendments being offered, to assure that I do not weaken a good bill through ignorance of its intended benefits -- whether the benefits accrue to people or projects that affect services of many different kinds.

How the House rules help Members' use their limited time well:

When a bill is called up, the Rules Committee will have determined ahead of time whether it is a closed rule, meaning no amendments may be offered, or an open rule, which means as many amendments may be offered as there is time for. The Rules Committee also sets time limits on general debate on the bill in total, and then time limits on the debate on each amendment. The Rules Committee is diligent about time, for the simple reason that there are 435 members of the House and if they all get equal time and an equal opportunity to offer amendments, it could take weeks, months or years to pass some bills.

I also must study the rule under which a bill is being considered, to make certain that I can support it. The Rules Committee can, and has, offered rules that would govern debate on bills that a majority of Members have rejected -- sometimes members of the House want more time, more amendments; other times we want less time or fewer amendments.

Listening to and participating in the debate:

It is not always possible for Members to go to the House Chamber (we call this "going to the floor") and sit through the entire House debate every day. I do so on bills that come out of the committees on which I serve, but not always on bills from other committees.

The debate of the House of Representatives is broadcast into our offices (and to the Nation) over C-SPAN. If my schedule permits, I will listen to the debate in my office, while dealing with other matters such as responding to constituent mail, taking phone calls from the district, and meeting with constituents who have come to Washington to meet with me about issues of concern to them.

Other scheduled meetings throughout the day:

Often, once the House convenes at 10:00 a.m., I am also scheduled to attend a hearing, or a mark up of legislation, in one of my committees or subcommittees.

I wear a beeper, and when it goes off it tells me what bill is being debated, and the amendment on which I am being called to the floor to vote. These are normally 15 minute votes. By the time you travel from a House Office Building hearing room to the Capitol and vote, more than 15 minutes have elapsed, and then you rush back to your hearing room to reconvene and continue to listen to testimony that is the subject of the hearing, whatever it might be.

This process goes on throughout the day, sometimes with only a few votes scheduled, and other times dozens of votes a day, each taking 15 minutes each. (There are times, however, when five minute votes occur, when votes have been "clustered" throughout the day, with votes scheduled on a series of postponed votes later in the day. Then the first vote takes 15 minutes, and thereafter all other votes occur in five minute intervals). I try to listen to the debate whenever

possible, but I must also be present in committee hearings, subcommittee hearings, markups on legislation, meetings in my personal office with constituents and others concerned with legislation, while also dealing with the mail from the people I represent and answering the telephone, and so I am constantly on the move during the day.

How laws are enacted (a brief synopsis):

Once a bill has been considered by Subcommittees and full Committees having jurisdiction over their subject matter, the bill is reported to the whole House and placed on the House Calendar. It is then scheduled to come up and be debated by 435 members of the house, amended where necessary, and voted on. A bill is passed by a majority vote in the house (a simple majority means at least 218 Members must vote yes in order to pass a bill, unless it requires a two-thirds vote in which case 290 of the 435 Members have to vote yes (or two-thirds of the Members present and voting). The bill must then await action by the U.S. Senate -- meaning that the Senate can vote on the House-passed bill, or on a Senate bill that is similar in nature and scope.

When both the House and Senate have acted to pass a bill, they then must meet in a Conference Committee to work out any differences and reach agreement on one, final version of the bill. Once that is done, both Houses must vote on the final version and, if passed a second time, the bill is sent to the President for his signature into law. If the President objects to legislation passed by the Congress and sent to him, he can veto the entire bill (the Supreme Court recently struck down the "Line-Item Veto" authority for the President where under he could veto only a part of a bill, while approving the remainder, sending the disapproved sections back to Congress for reconsideration). The House and Senate can then schedule a vote to "override" the President's veto. If that occurs, the legislation then becomes law without the President's signature. If Congress does not have the votes to "override" a Presidential veto (it requires a two-thirds majority vote to override a veto), then Congress must try to pass new legislation that the President can accept.

Structure of my Congressional offices:

I have five offices located in my district: in Beckley, Bluefield, Logan, Huntington, and Lewisburg, West Virginia.

My district offices, and my professional staff who work in those offices, handle what is known as "case work," which means helping constituents obtain access to the system of human and social services they may need. This includes Social Security Benefits, Supplemental Security Benefits (SSI), benefits for the aged, blind and disabled, Black Lung benefits for coal miners and their families, and workers' compensation benefits for those injured in the workplace. District office staff also provide information to constituents on pending legislation, or they refer such inquiries to me in Washington for a comprehensive response.

In Washington, I have professional staff people who are assigned to specific legislation and issues. They study these issues and report directly to me. My staff also help me respond to hundreds of letters and postcards (sometimes thousands) per week, from constituents expressing their concern, support, or opposition, to various pending matters. I consider all such constituent positions when I vote on legislation.

My main goals and objectives:

As the elected federal representative of the Third Congressional District in West Virginia, it is my job to assist West Virginia, and particularly my own 17 county Congressional District, in creating jobs, protecting our environment, designing projects to assist in the economic development of the area, building and repairing roads, highways and bridges; upgrading airports and travel and tourism opportunities; aiding communities in meeting clean water standards, both drinking water and wastewater treatment facilities; educating our children; and addressing the concerns of coal miners and their families as they relate to the coal industry.

I achieve many of the above goals and objectives by serving on the Transportation and Resources committees as noted above.